

SQUIRREL RIVER

WILD AND SCENIC RIVER STUDY

Public Information

Brochure

Public Meetings To Be Held In:

Kiana

Noorvik

Kotzebue

Fairbanks: February 9, 1983 7:00 p.m.  
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# United States Department of the Interior

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Alaska Regional Office  
540 West Fifth Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

IN REPLY REFER TO:

L58 (ARO-P)

JAN 12 1983

Dear Reviewer:

Enclosed for your information, review, and comment is an informational brochure describing the study of the Squirrel River as a possible addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The study was mandated by Congress in Section 604 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Public Law 96-487.

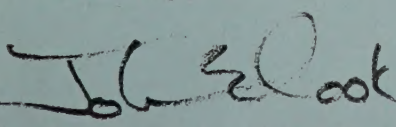
This brochure presents the findings of the study team including a number of alternative actions. The alternatives range from taking no further Congressional action to protect the present character of the river to designation of all or portions of the river to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Although the findings indicate that the river qualifies for addition to the National System, designation may not be the action which is preferred or most suitable. Your input and that of other interested individuals and groups will be important in selecting the preferred alternative. The public comment period for this phase of the studies will be open until March 6, 1983.

Public meetings have been scheduled for the purpose of discussing the alternatives identified in the brochure and any other alternatives which may be identified. The general public will be notified of these meetings via announcements in local newspapers and other means. Written comments should be sent to:

Regional Director  
Alaska Regional Office  
National Park Service  
540 W. 5th Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

After the meetings and public comment period, a preferred alternative will be selected. A report/draft environmental impact statement describing the preferred alternative and the alternatives considered will be prepared and you will be given an opportunity to again comment.

Sincerely,

  
Regional Director  
Alaska Region

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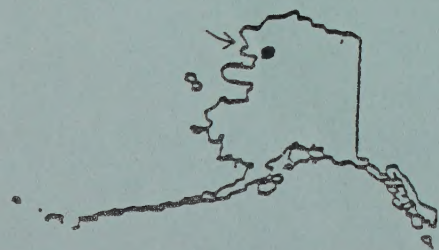
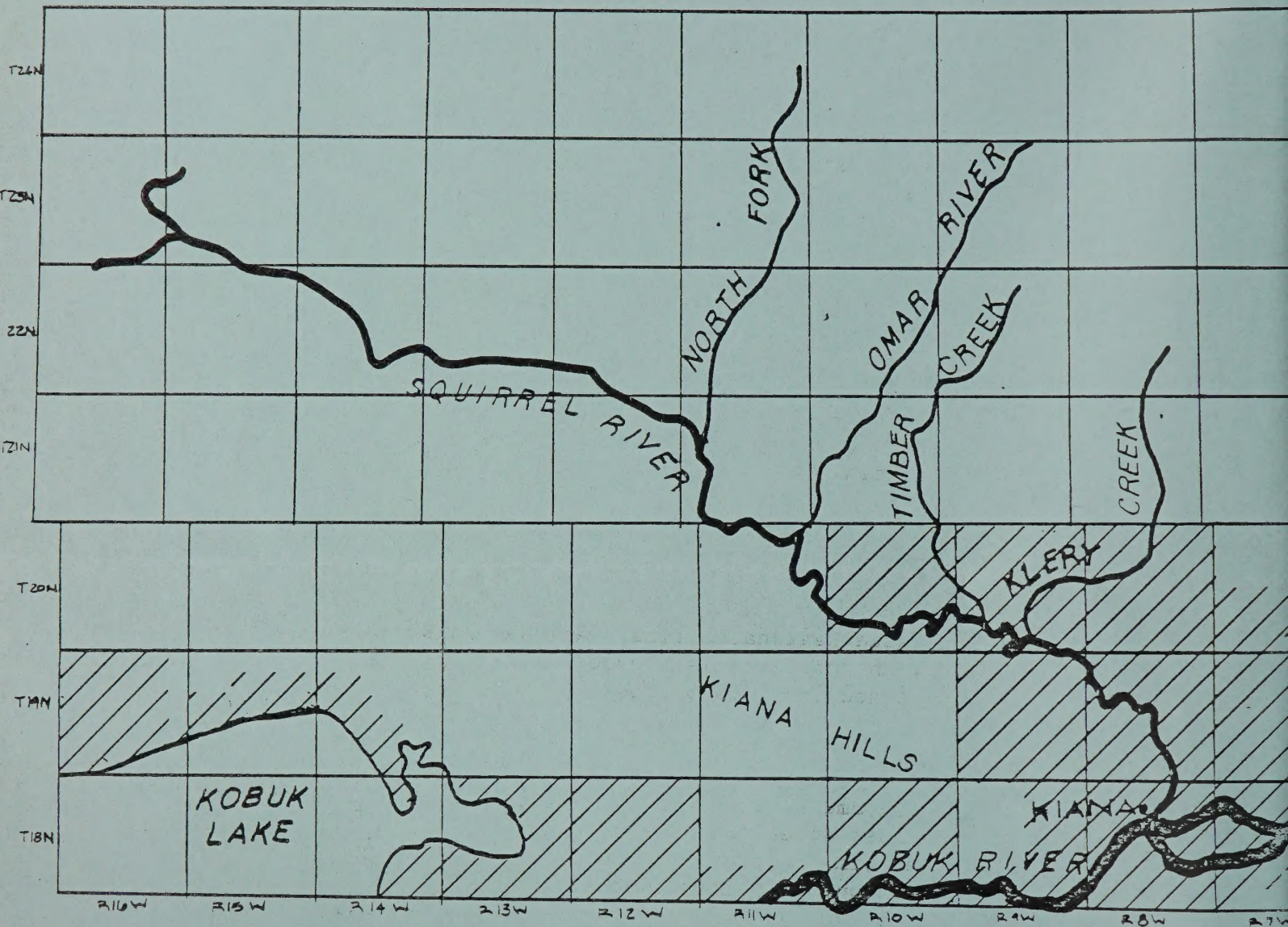


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# SQUIRREL RIVER STUDY AREA



Native Village Selections



## INTRODUCTION

This publication describes a study of the Squirrel River now in progress. The purpose of the study is to determine whether all or any part of the Squirrel River is eligible and suitable as a possible addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The purpose of this brochure, in addition to describing the study, is to invite your comments and suggestions. The brochure briefly explains the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, describes the study process, presents the findings of the study team to date, and describes the alternatives under consideration. This publication is not the study report. That report along with the environmental impact statement will be prepared and circulated for review at a later date.

Public meetings are being scheduled in the vicinity of the Squirrel River. Interested persons are urged to attend and to present their views orally or in writing. In particular your assistance is requested in identifying issues and concerns and in suggesting a preferred action from the alternatives presented herein or identification of additional alternative(s). Public involvement is a major element of this study effort. The public meetings will help to insure continued consideration of public concerns.

The record for this phase of the Squirrel River study will remain open for public comments until March 6, 1983. Those wishing to provide comments or statements should address correspondence to: John E. Cook, Regional Director, Alaska Regional Office, National Park Service, 540 W. 5th Avenue, Room 202, Anchorage, Alaska 99501. The last page of this brochure has been designed for this purpose.

## REASON FOR THIS STUDY

Several years ago it became apparent that the free-flowing qualities of many of the Nation's most appealing rivers would be lost to the construction of dams and other similar projects, unless special measures were taken for their protection. In 1968 Congress enacted the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, P. L. 90-542. The Act declares it the policy of the United States,

. . .that certain selected rivers of the Nation, which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present<sup>and</sup> future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dam and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.



The Act established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; designated eight rivers as the initial components of the System; and prescribed methods and standards by which additional rivers may be added to the System. Numerous amendments to the Act and Secretarial designations since 1968 have resulted in sixty-one current components of the System, including twenty-six in Alaska added by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Public Law 96-487. An additional 88 rivers in the nation have been proposed or are currently under study (one of which is the Squirrel River) as possible additions to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

#### HOW THE STUDY IS BEING CONDUCTED

A multi-disciplinary study team with representatives from interested state and federal agencies and native interests is assisting the National Park Service in the study. In addition to the National Park Service the study team includes expertise from the Bureau of Land Management (manager of federal lands in the study area), Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and NANA Regional Corporation. In addition numerous other federal, state, and local agencies or interests are providing technical input.

The study was initiated in March, 1982, with announcements sent to many agencies and organizations, followed by the issuance of a news release. In August a field inspection was made of the river by some members of the study team. In October, the study team met to evaluate the study area and determine the Squirrel River's eligibility and suitability as a potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. A number of preliminary alternatives were identified. Following the public meetings, the study team will meet again to evaluate all available information including public input in order to select a preferred alternative. A draft river study report/environmental impact statement describing the resources in the study area, the preferred alternative and the alternatives considered, the issues and concerns, and the effects of the proposed action and alternatives will be prepared and circulated for agency and public review. Following review, the report/environmental impact statement will be revised as necessary and submitted through the President to Congress. Congress will make the decision whether to add any portion of the Squirrel River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The decision will be largely based upon the recommendations and analysis contained in the report and any additional public comments Congress wishes to gather.

#### ELIGIBILITY, SUITABILITY, AND CLASSIFICATION DETERMINATION FOR THE SQUIRREL RIVER

##### Eligibility

To be eligible for the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System a river segment must:



Be in a substantially free-flowing natural condition.

Possess at least one outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values.

The study team determined the river to be eligible from its headwaters to its confluence with the Kobuk River at Kiana. This determination is based upon the river's free-flowing condition and the following characteristics:

- \* Outstanding fisheries values, particularly chum salmon spawning habitat.
- \* Outstanding recreation values, including convenient access; safe, easy floatboating; pristine, scenic landscape; wildlife viewing opportunities; sport fishing; sport hunting; hiking; and camping.
- \* Outstanding scenery, particularly the range of scenic variety. The river begins in a mountain valley, moves through a spruce forest and area with high bluffs and scenic vistas, and finally flows through a somewhat flat tundra with the stark Killarichuk Hills visible in the distance.

Other notable characteristics include:

In addition to chum salmon the river provides habitat for white fish, pink salmon, arctic char, northern pike and grayling.

The area provides important winter moose habitat.

The lowland areas along the river are part of a confirmed high use brown bear area.

The general Squirrel River area is believed to contain significant archaeologic sites.

The waters of the Squirrel River are extremely clear.

### Suitability

A preliminary assessment of suitability is based largely on the extent of federal lands within the study area and the interest of non-federal landowners in possibly administering their lands as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The study area from the headwaters down to about six miles below the confluence with the Omar River is primarily federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management. This portion is tentatively suitable. The remainder of the river flows through lands selected by the NANA Regional Corporation and are thus private or expected to be privately owned. If NANA indicates a preference for having the lower segment considered as a potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, it will be treated as tentatively suitable.



Otherwise, the lower segment will be tentatively nonsuitable. An indication has not been made yet by NANA. The actual determination of suitability will be made by the Secretary of the Interior after review of the preliminary assessment and consideration of any other appropriate factors.

### Classification

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act provides that rivers shall be classified as wild, scenic or recreational. A river (or portion of a river) is placed in the classification which most accurately describes its existing condition. The three classes are defined as follows:

1. Wild River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments and generally inaccessible except by trail; with watersheds or shorelines essentially primitive and waters unpolluted. These represent vestiges of primitive America.
2. Scenic River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads.
3. Recreational River Areas - Those rivers or sections of rivers that are readily accessible by road or railroad, that may have some development along their shorelines, and that may have undergone some impoundment or diversion in the past.

All of the Squirrel River qualifies for a wild classification.

### THE IDENTIFIED ALTERNATIVES

The study team has identified a number of alternatives for consideration in the study process. The alternatives vary from taking no action for including any portion of the Squirrel River into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to designation of the entire river as a National Wild River. The alternatives listed below may be added to or reduced in number as the study progresses. Eventually one will be selected as the preferred alternative. The fact that a river has been found to meet the criteria and is qualified for designation, does not necessarily mean that it is feasible, desirable, or in the public interest to propose that the river be designated as a component of the National System.

The preliminary alternatives are:

- 1) Designation of Federally administered portion of Squirrel River.

The designated area would include the river and adjacent Federal lands from its headwaters to the beginning of Native village/regional land selections at the west boundary of T20N, R10W. The river segment would be classified as wild. Administration of the river segment would remain with the Bureau of Land Management. Any non-Federal lands within the segment such as individual Native allotments would be excluded from the



designated river area. Following designation the Bureau of Land Management would be responsible for preparing a management plan for the river. This plan will establish specific management measures to be used in administration of the corridor to protect aesthetic, scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific and other features of the river area. The plan will also establish specific management boundaries.

In general the Bureau of Land Management will be responsible for administering the designated river area to protect and enhance the values which caused it to be included in the National System. It provides a basis for cooperative management of the entire river to protect resources and existing uses (subsistence, recreation, etc.), to protect private property and interests, and to deal with potential conflicts among river users and uses.

Designation would preclude dams or other water resource developments which would have an adverse effect on the Squirrel River. Other forms of change or development would not be precluded, but designation would influence the degree or manner in which future change or development could occur. Transportation or utility systems would be allowed, but would have to be located and constructed in an environmentally sound manner.

## 2) Designation of "middle portion" of Squirrel River.

The designated area would include the river and adjacent Federal lands from the north boundary of T22N, R14W to T20N, R10W. The river segment would be classified as wild. The upper few miles of the river, which are not included as part of the designated area, do not include important fish habitat nor provide as much recreation value. Specifically this portion of the river is not floatable by small boats. The provisions would be the same as described under the first alternative.

## 3) Designation of Federally administered portion of Squirrel River and lower few miles of the North Fork and Omar River.

The designated area would include the same area described under the first alternative plus the lower few miles of the North Fork and Omar River below the north boundary of T22N. The river segments would be classified as wild. This alternative captures within the designated river area the suspected important fishery habitat and the recreational values offered by these major tributaries. The provisions would be the same as described under the first alternative.

## 4) Designation of the entire Squirrel River.

The designated area would include the main stem of the river and adjacent lands from the headwaters to the confluence of the river and the Kobuk River. This alternative includes the lower several miles of the river crossing Native village/regional selected lands. Congress has in the past excluded non-federal lands from wild river designations in Alaska. This action would require the consent of the NANA Regional Corporation



in order for it to be a suitable proposal. The provisions would be the same as described for the first alternative, except the regional corporation would administer the lower river area. There would have to be close cooperative planning and management of the entire river area by the Bureau of Land Management and NANA Regional Corporation.

5) No Action

No portion of the Squirrel River or its tributaries would be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System under this alternative. The federal lands would be administered by the Bureau of Land Management according to the goals and objectives of the Bureau's Northwest Planning Area management framework plan.

The present interim protection of Federal lands in the Squirrel River study area to maintain the primitive and undeveloped character would be removed. It is not known what human caused changes might occur in the area. But these lands would probably someday be made available for oil and gas leasing and other uses and would be subject to less restrictive guidelines for transportation and utility corridor developments.



MAILER FOR WRITTEN COMMENTS

In the space provided below you are invited to provide your written comments. You are urged to identify issues or concerns pertinent to the study of the Squirrel River, indicate a preference for any of the alternatives or identify additional alternatives, and signify if you wish to have your name placed on a mailing list to receive future information on this study.

The record for receiving comments on this phase of the studies will remain open until March 6, 1983.

Fold and mail. No stamp is necessary.

COMMENTS

Issues or Concerns:

Alternatives:

Other comments:

The Privacy Act and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) govern the formation, maintenance, and disclosure of Federal Government mailing lists. Under provisions of the FOIA, the names and addresses of persons on Federal mailing lists may be released to the public upon request. If a person objects to having his or her name and address subject to public release, as required by the law, they may not be placed on Federal mailing lists. To be added to or retained on the mailing lists of the National Park Service in Alaska, a person must understand these provisions of the FOIA and submit a specific request in writing.

*I wish to be placed/retained on the National Park Service, Alaska Region, mailing list for information on current Park Service activities. I understand that my name and address may be released to the public under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act of 1974.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group affiliation (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, and zipcode: \_\_\_\_\_



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